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C O N F I D E N T I A L THE HAGUE 001647

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STATE FOR SECRETARY RICE  
DEFENSE FOR SECRETARY GATES

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/07/2017

TAGS: PREL PGOV AF MOPS NL

SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS: SCENESETTER -- DEFENSE MINISTER VAN  
MIDDELKOOP'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON

REF: THE HAGUE 1625

Classified By: CDA Michael Gallagher, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

Madame Secretary/Mr. Secretary:

¶1. (C) Dutch Defense Minister Eimert van Middelkoop heads to Washington during a turbulent period for the Dutch Ministry of Defense. The Dutch are deployed to a challenging area of Afghanistan as part of ISAF, filling a vital hole in the Alliance's efforts in the south. The GONL is looking hard at extending, but needs help from some other NATO Allies and friends -- discussions at NATO and in capitals are beginning to bear fruit regarding possible contributions that might allow the Dutch to extend as lead nation beyond their July 31, 2008 mission mandate. But more contributions will likely be required in order to overcome a volatile domestic political situation. Meanwhile, the current mission in Afghanistan has proven far more expensive than originally anticipated, affecting defense projects across the board. The GONL appreciates our "low-profile" approach to the Dutch extension question. But van Middelkoop will come asking for help, whether it be "arm twisting" at NATO and capitals to answer the Dutch plea for help, to looking for creative ways to resolve issues dealing with the C-17 strategic airlift initiative or restrictions related to the International Traffic in Arms Regulations.

¶2. (SBU) This will be van Middelkoop's first trip to Washington as Defense Minister. Following a stopover in New York to meet with UN SYG Ban Ki Moon and other senior UN officials, van Middelkoop arrives in Washington on September 12 to meet with Secretary Gates, Deputy Secretary of State England, and Under Secretary of Defense Chu. He ends the day at an Armed Forces Day Reception at the Dutch Embassy. On September 13, Van Middelkoop meets with DHS Deputy Secretary Jackson in the morning, followed by a luncheon focusing on Africa at the National Defense University. Following lunch, van Middelkoop meets with Secretary Rice and NSC Special Advisor Jeffrey. To end the day, van Middelkoop gives a press brief to Dutch correspondents and then flies to Key West for later programs at the Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF-S). He later flies to Tampa for a meeting with Admiral Fallon at USCENTCOM.

¶3. (C) Van Middelkoop hails from the most junior member of the coalition government, the Christian Union (CU). While this is the first time for the CU and van Middelkoop in the government, van Middelkoop has vast foreign and security

policy experience as a member in the first and second chambers of parliament. He is widely recognized as the author of the Dutch policy requiring the government to seek parliamentary acceptance of military deployments overseas -- a result of the Dutch failure to prevent the massacre at the Muslim enclave of Srebrnica in 1995. Experienced on defense issues, Van Middelkoop is cautious by nature and considered a bit green on politicking -- he has not been as influential as his predecessor Henk Kamp. Most policy on Afghanistan, for example, is dictated by Foreign Minister Verhagen or Development Minister Koenders.

Afghanistan

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¶4. (C) Afghanistan will be the main focus of Defense Minister van Middelkoop's trip to Washington; all defense issues can be viewed through the Afghanistan prism as the Dutch deployment affects these issues in some fashion. Partnering with the Australians, the Dutch are currently the ISAF lead in Uruzgan province -- their mission mandate ends July 31, ¶2008. Per reftel, the Dutch Cabinet has delayed making a decision until early October in the hopes of further solidifying the case in favor of extending. Most key members of the cabinet favor an extension, albeit in a reduced role.

¶5. (C) As a result, the Dutch have been pressing NATO and other Allies for contributions. Discussions at NATO and the Dutch bilateral blitz in several Allied capitals are beginning to bear fruit -- the Slovaks and Danes appear ready to answer the Dutch call, while the Australians are looking to increase their troop contributions and perhaps bring in an additional country to the mix. Finally, Norway is taking a hard look at teaming with the Dutch, although leaks to the press have made the Dutch request vulnerable to domestic Norwegian politics.

¶6. (C) Even with these contributions, however, the Dutch feel they need more to obtain approval for an extension. The GONL faces a volatile political situation that in no way guarantees an extension. Five of the six key decision-makers in Cabinet -- including van Middelkoop -- tentatively support an extension. Finance Minister and Labor Party leader Wouter Bos, however, faces tremendous pressure from his party's rank-and-file to end the mission. That puts him in the unenviable position of either upsetting his party if he supports an extension, or isolating himself within the Cabinet if he opposes it. The strong belief that Bos will soon lose the party chairman position leaves him vulnerable to further attacks from the left.

¶7. (C) Leftist opposition parties for the most part have been relatively restrained in their criticism of the mission, but still clamor for a Dutch withdrawal in August 2008 -- they claim reconstruction is impossible given the security situation. Public support for extending remains below fifty percent, although Dutch casualties -- ten thus far -- have not swayed public opinion to the extent that we had feared.

¶8. (C) Several other factors could derail any extension possibilities. The GONL initially sold the Uruzgan mission to its parliament based on the belief that the Dutch could make significant reconstruction progress. Demonstrating such progress, therefore, is crucial, and Development Minister Koenders will soon be traveling to Uruzgan "looking for evidence" to build his case. Budget woes also are a factor -- the Uruzgan mission has become much more expensive than initially anticipated. GONL officials claim they have the money -- or can find a way -- to make any extension work, but most likely at the expense of other military projects (see below).

¶9. (C) The results of a COMISAF investigation into civilian casualties associated with Dutch heavy fighting in Chora also could harm any extension plans. COMISAF determined that the Dutch Task Force Uruzgan commander "violated the Law of Armed Conflict." The Dutch are contesting the results, and have

asked SACEUR to weigh in -- Dutch officials are concerned that opposition parliamentarians could use COMISAF's findings to argue that the Dutch are involved in fighting above their capabilities. Finally, counternarcotics strategy continues to prove problematic. The Dutch do not support poppy eradication without alternatives. Any decision favoring ground-spraying would send "negative shockwaves" throughout The Hague.

¶10. (C) The GONL is acutely aware of the upcoming redeployment of U.S. helicopters from southern Afghanistan at the end of January 2008. Dutch officials claim to have pressed Allies for helicopter support during their bilateral consultations. Yet, they also acknowledge the hope that NATO can "fix" this problem, while the Dutch focus on "the other pieces" to a possible extension mission. Van Middelkoop expects to hear from Washington interlocutors on the potential helicopter shortfall.

#### U.S. Role on Extension Question

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¶11. (C) GONL officials at all levels have greatly appreciated Washington's "low-profile" on the extension question. Any public statement by USG officials, no matter how benign, is spun by the Dutch press and political opposition into evidence of American interference and pressure. Van Middelkoop will no doubt ask Washington to "keep up" the low profile, but also may ask for some behind-the-scenes "arm twisting" assistance in Allied capitals and at NATO in order to obtain more contributions toward an extended mission.

#### NATO

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¶12. (C) The Dutch experience in Afghanistan has influenced how they see NATO and its future. Dutch officials are disappointed that other Allies have yet to step up and contribute troops in the challenging south. They believe it is NATO's responsibility to find the right combination of

troops in Uruzgan to continue the ISAF mission, but readily admit that the Netherlands is part of NATO -- as such, they will do all they can to stay in Uruzgan as the lead nation, albeit in a reduced role.

¶13. (C) Per reftel, there is a growing perception here that NATO was slow to respond to the Netherlands' request for assistance to find new potential partners. The Dutch parliament has picked up on this -- "we have done our share" -- and has made clear that NATO must demonstrate it has made a concerted effort to address Dutch burden-sharing concerns prior to any parliamentary extension approval. The lack of progress on the burden-sharing front has led some Dutch officials, including senior Dutch military officers, to suggest those countries in the southern Afghanistan focus their efforts on resolving troop shortfalls amongst themselves, instead of relying on "fair weather" members of the Alliance.

¶14. (C) From an existential standpoint, Dutch concerns over NATO dated prior to the Riga Summit -- and for the most part, these "whither NATO" concerns will carry over to the 2008 summit in Bucharest. The Dutch supported the global partnership initiative at Riga -- and have benefited from their Australian partnership in Uruzgan. However, key Dutch officials have questioned where NATO is heading. They support NATO's "out of area operations," but have real concerns regarding force generation for the NATO Response Force and the future composition of the alliance. Gaining Dutch support on membership or extending membership action plan (MAP) offers will be difficult.

#### Dutch Defense Transformation

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¶15. (C) Under van Middelkoop's predecessor, the Dutch military launched an ambitious transformation process in the

attempt to become leaner and more expeditionary, while at the same time significantly reducing personnel via an MOD reorganization. The reorganization is almost complete, but many big ticket items planned for the Dutch military -- such as tactical tomahawks and unmanned aerial vehicles -- have been postponed or abandoned to preserve priorities like the Joint Strike Fighter. The MOD has been spared from government-wide budget cuts, but the unexpected cost of the Uruzgan mission has certainly complicated the defense budget, and poor management and oversight also have played contributing roles. Other recent cuts have included an F-16 squadron and two tank squadrons, as well as abandoning participation in the NATO Air Ground Surveillance program. The GONL will present the national budget next week, and other defense projects may be abandoned, such as the C-17 initiative.

¶16. (C) Van Middelkoop has made a concerted effort to focus more upon MOD personnel and morale. Such attention may be a result in part of sexual harassment scandals rocking the Dutch navy last year. But van Middelkoop appears genuine in his concern. He leads an MOD facing for the first time in over a decade post-combat challenges -- a number of discipline incidents have occurred as a result of Dutch troops returning from Afghanistan and interacting with civilian life. Van Middelkoop plans to raise with Under Secretary Chu such issues as mission preparedness, personnel

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readiness, mission rotation periods, civilian deployment in combat zones, and post traumatic stress disorder.

C-17

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¶17. (C) Strategic airlift is one of the Netherlands' most pressing needs, and politically, the MOD, the MFA, and the Finance Ministry agree the C-17 strategic airlift initiative is a top priority. As a result, the Dutch indicated they would be interested in reserving 500 hours -- third most -- in the initiative's first year. The Dutch also were under the impression that the three or four C-17s could be leased. The requirement to buy the planes up front has driven up the program's cost, and the MFA and MOD have bitterly fought over which ministry should foot the bill. Given the expanding cost of the Afghanistan mission, GONL officials are not optimistic that the initiative will be included when this year's budget is presented to parliament on September 18.

The Dutch have actively engaged in discussions to reduce costs, and also inquired whether extending the payment plan is a possibility. It is not clear whether a Dutch pullout would affect other countries' participation. Van Middelkoop will raise the C-17 initiative with Deputy Secretary England, asking for creative solutions that facilitate continued Dutch participation.

JSF

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¶18. (C) The Dutch are strong partners in the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) program, signing the production, sustainment, and follow-on MOU last year. The big question facing the Dutch is how many JSFs they plan to purchase. The new coalition agreement makes clear that any decision to purchase the fighter be contingent on the results of an independent, third party review of the program -- we expect that review to take place in early 2008. The Dutch have pushed hard to be included within the Operation Test and Evaluation (OT&E) phase; MOD State Secretary van der Knaap had hoped to sign the OT&E MOU when he visited Washington in July. We have heard rumblings that due to defense budget limitations, the Dutch may not be able to afford the two test planes that would allow them to participate in OT&E -- but this has not yet been confirmed. DM Middelkoop will raise JSF during his meeting with Deputy Secretary England.

Africa

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¶19. (C) The Dutch have been active members in various peacekeeping, security sector reform, and training missions in Africa, including UNMIS in Sudan, the EU security sector reform mission in the Congo, and security sector reform in Burundi, Mali, and Rwanda. Coalition member Labor has long been interested in a more active role in Africa; Development Minister and Labor member Koenders is pushing increased GONL involvement. As a result, the GONL recently informed the Dutch parliament that it was considering possible future missions in Africa.

¶20. (C) Given the Christian Union's long-standing interest in humanitarian assistance for Africa -- and van Middelkoop's personal convictions -- van Middelkoop also is viewed as a proponent of an increased Dutch military role on the continent. The trick for van Middelkoop, however, is to ensure that the Dutch remain engaged in Afghanistan -- any mission to Africa cannot come at the expense of the Dutch mission in Afghanistan. Many in the GONL believe any substantial role for the Dutch in Africa will have to wait until the Dutch have completed their mission in Afghanistan, although most leftist opposition parties would support shifting resources immediately from Afghanistan to Africa.

¶21. (C) Given their potentially expanded role in Africa, the Dutch also are keenly interested in AFRICOM, and have inquired whether it might be possible to imbed Dutch officers within the command. Van Middelkoop plans to raise AFRICOM during his meeting with Secretary Gates, and will participate in a luncheon at NDU focused on Africa.

ITAR

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¶22. (C) The GONL has real concerns regarding International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) restrictions and their impact on Dutch ability to work within NATO. Dutch constitutional provisions to protect their citizens' privacy conflict with ITAR export control restrictions requiring identification of dual-nationals and requirements for non-disclosure agreements. As a result, the Dutch have been unable to sign pending Technical Assistance Agreements (TAA) relating to its ISAF mission in Afghanistan. The Dutch understand these restrictions are not aimed specifically against them, as many other NATO Allies are affected. However, given the difficult debate regarding a possible extension of the Dutch mission in Afghanistan, the Dutch will argue that any possible arrangement to ease restrictions on their dual-nationals will help bolster the case in favor of extending. During his meeting with Secretary Rice, van Middelkoop will likely propose as a possible solution that Dutch personnel with access to U.S. military equipment

undergo security background checks made in consultation with U.S. authorities.

Gallagher